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ABSTRACT

A new major at the University of Scranton (Pennsylvania), International Language/Business (IL/Bus), is described that first accepted students in 1986. This foreign language major of 27 credits, with a concentration in business was modeled on two cooperative programs between the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Management that were already in place: the Chemistry/Business and Electronics Engineering/Business majors. The IL/Bus major and other developments in the university have caused foreign language enrollments to flourish in the past several years. The university has seen the establishment of minors and the development of a university-wide advising system. Resulting planning challenges are discussed such as those related to staffing and study abroad. Other issues include a lack of genuine student interest in both foreign language study and business, and university recruiting that is possibly misleading in terms of career options. It is concluded that faculty must continue to identify areas of the IL/Bus program that can be improved and to reconsider the content of the business component of the major. (LB)

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The "International Language/Business" Major at a Small Private University: Successes and Nagging Concerns

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In academic year 1983-84 Dr. Thomas A. Kamla, my immediate predecessor as Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Scranton, sketched out a plan for a foreign language major based in the Foreign Language department and the College of Arts and Sciences with a strong concentration in business courses in the School of Management. As a Professor of German in a University with no foreign language requirement, my predecessor was perhaps more sensitive than his colleagues in Spanish and French to the needs of the career oriented student of the 1980's. He was, of course, also responding to initiatives at the national level, including the 1979 President's Commission report, Senator Paul Simon's widely reviewed book The Tongue-Tied American, and numerous press releases that showed the U.S. to be at a competitive disadvantage in international commerce because of most North Americans' lack of functional foreign language skills.

I recall being supportive, but skeptical, of Kamla's efforts. My language, Spanish, had respectable enrollments, and in any case I was far too concerned at the time with the fate of several articles I had circulating and my possibilities for tenure and promotion to take much more than a passing interest in the project. My skepticism was shared by most of our departmental colleagues, and there was also more than a little outright hostility expressed from some secluded corners, where Kamla's ideas were regarded as a frontal assault on the department's and the University's commitment to the Humanities.

Despite all of this, my predecessor pushed ahead with the project. Contrary to my expectations, there was no cynicism in other sectors of the University, where reaction was almost without exception supportive. The Foreign Language department chair worked closely with the then Acting Dean of the School of Management to decide on the appropriate number of required and elective business courses for the major. The result was a modified foreign language major with a "concentration" in business of 27 credits (six more than the School of Management's own minor). The new major was modeled on two cooperative programs between the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Management already in place: the Chemistry/Business and Electronics Engineering/ Business majors.

These two existing majors were reviewed carefully by the Foreign Language department and the Deans of Art and Sciences and the School of Management. Our department adapted the basic structures of these existing programs to our own needs. Department members then settled on a name for the new major, International Language/Business. The Foreign Language department assumed complete responsibility for oversight of the major, with the understanding that frequent consultation with School of Management administrators and faculty would be both necessary and desirable. The program was approved by the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Conference late in 1984-85. The University's Board of Trustees approved it in the summer of 1985, and incoming majors were accepted for the first time in the fall of 1986. In

anticipation of the major's approval, several students actually began structuring their foreign language major to meet the requirements of the IL/Bus major as early as fall 1985.

Beyond the need for individual faculty members to offer "readers" (as independent study tutorial courses are called at the University of Scranton) in Business French, German and Spanish to the few students who had already been taking the designated business courses in the School of Management and wished to declare the new major, the formal institution of the major brought no immediate changes. I rather expected that it would follow the pattern of the Chem/Bus and EE/Bus majors; that is, it would exist in the University catalog, a few students would opt for it, and it would require few if any resources, since, with the exception of the business language courses, it really entailed only the add-on of existing courses in the School of Management.

We got the first hint of what was actually to occur when, in the fall of 1986, we had 15 new majors, 11 of them IL/Bus. This was good news indeed! In the seven years I had been at the University never had more than 3 or 4 new majors shown up at our traditional faculty meeting with incoming majors the day before fall classes begin. Now here were 15! Still, their presence as IL/Bus majors had little real effect that first year. They took their normal general education requirements and were easily assimilated into our first, second and third year language courses, depending upon their language backgrounds, with no effect at all

on the rest of our offerings. The following fall (1987) we had 18 incoming majors, again the vast majority of them IL/Bus students.

By then it was apparent that the department would have to make some changes to meet the needs of these students. An increased emphasis was placed on study abroad opportunities, both at the level of the department advisor and, coincidentally, University wide, as the study abroad programs were centralized under the capable oversight of the Associate Dean of Art and Sciences. The need to develop courses in contemporary culture and similar "relevant" topics, and questions such as whether the Business language course should be one or two semesters, and how often it and the newly instituted sequence of Advanced Stylistics should be offered, loomed large in our immediate future. It was obvious that while these students would certainly need and expect some exposure to the various national literatures, we could not continue to feed them a steady diet of French Neo-Classical Poetry, Spanish Golden Age Prose, or German Sturm und Drang lyric poetry.

For the past several years, since I have been department chairperson, we have had between 20 and 25 incoming majors each fall. The majority of these are IL/Bus majors, although we have seen a better balance in the last two years, with six (1990) and ten (1991) traditional language majors.

These new students alone would have put a squeeze on departmental faculty resources. However, other developments within the University also caused foreign language enrollments to flourish.

For example, before 1985 it was not possible to minor in a discipline at the University of Scranton. Before then, students could only develop cognate areas, often loosely defined and normally closely related to their majors. By 1988, just three years after the minor was instituted, the department of Foreign Languages had some 80 to 90 declared minors, the second largest number of any academic department in the University. And these were only the declared minors! Many other students were actively pursuing the minor with the intent of declaring when it when all the requisite course work was completed. These students, combined with the IL/Bus majors, caused upper-division enrollments to surge out of control. Also, in 1988, freshman advising was moved out of departments and centralized under the Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences, who developed an academic advising system staffed by faculty members who were give reassigned time from teaching to participate. The Associate Dean as well as several of the new advisors were strong advocates of foreign language study, and this change to a University wide advising system likewise had a very positive impact on foreign language enrollments. To give some idea of the extent of the expansion, a typical slate of upper-division offerings in the Spanish section of the department prior to 1985 included two sections of Advanced Composition and Conversation and two literature courses (or one literature course and a Culture and Civilization course), with a total enrollment of between 30 and 50 students. By 1991 the upper-division offerings in Spanish included six sections of

Advanced Composition and Conversation, three sections of Advanced Stylistics (a writing level above Advanced Comp and Con), a Business Spanish course and two literature offerings, with a total enrollment of nearly two hundred students. Similar enrollment growth occurred at the lower-division level and, though less dramatic, in the other languages as well.

In short, all this wonderful expansion of foreign language study, occurring as it did within a three or four year period, created formidable planning challenges for the short and long term future, including severe staffing problems that would have been unthinkable just a few years earlier, when some department members were struggling to maintain a full-time course load. We were fortunate to have several competent, in a couple of cases outstanding, individuals in the immediate geographical area who were able to step in as adjuncts during the first couple years of our staffing emergency. In fact, we increased the number of part-time faculty positions from 3 to 12 in the three year period from 1987 to 1990. In addition, in 1989 we began to bring graduate students from Germany, France and Mexico to the University through the United Nation's IIE (Institute of International Education) division and from Japan through the Hokkaido International Foundation to teach foreign language courses while taking enrichment courses or pursuing degrees in other departments. Because ours is a small department with no graduate program and few majors from abroad, this has been a wonderful opportunity to provide our International Language/Business and

foreign language majors with much needed exposure to cultural diversity.

Despite the fiscal constraints under which the University has operated for the past three years, the department has also been able to add two new tenure-track positions. Our adjunct faculty, the foreign graduate teaching assistants and the new full-time professors have certainly helped to alleviate the staffing crisis, but much remains to be done. Current enrollment trends point to the need for additional full-time staff in German, Russian and Italian. I will continue to argue that the ability of the department to offer a wide range of foreign languages at diverse levels is a high priority and a critical aspect of our service to the International Language/ Business majors, who often choose languages other than the "Big Three" (Spanish, German and French) as their second foreign language.

A problem closely related to the staffing crisis brought on by the unanticipated heavy demand for foreign language courses is the proper and equitable allocation of staffing resources. One obvious effect of the increase in adjunct faculty and the presence of the foreign teaching assistants was that regular full-time faculty have been able to devote more time to developing the upper-division curriculum and specialized courses to meet the needs of both the International Language/Business majors and traditional foreign language majors. However, the difficulty has been that certain faculty members have refused to participate at all in the curriculum development made necessary by the influx of

career oriented foreign language students, preferring instead to continue rotating courses they have taught for the past twenty years with no regard for the students' needs and complete oblivion to their own ever-shrinking enrollments. This, of course, puts an inordinate workload on the cooperative and concerned faculty members of a small department. Professors who have had to develop business language courses, a two-course sequence in Advanced Stylistics, and contemporary culture courses, and who have worked in addition to improve their offerings at all levels by increasing the emphasis on listening comprehension and specialized contemporary vocabulary, find little or no time to teach the literature courses of their specialization or to pursue research projects they find personally rewarding. This inequitable division of labor is a reality in our department and it has created deep divisions among our faculty. I know of no short-term solutions to such problems; pressuring senior faculty member to teach courses in which they have no interest would have obvious counterproductive and negative consequences, both for those faculty members and the students. For the long term, I will continue to seek to expand the faculty in order to dilute further the influence of those who refuse to adapt to current departmental needs, and to dream of a <u>deus ex machina</u> in the form, perhaps, of an unexpected announcement, or two, of early retirement.

As vexing as these intractable personnel problems are for a departmental administrator, the students pose what I suspect will be the more important and more enduring challenges in the long

term. A primary area of concern is the quality of our students. Certainly the IL/Bus has attracted some outstanding students and, overall, there is no doubt that today's students at the University of Scranton take their language study much more seriously than those of a decade ago. However, approximately a third of the IL/Bus students appear to have no real commitment to the study of either languages or business. They plod along and maintain a high enough grade point average to allow them to remain in school and in the major, but show no real indication of dedication either to their studies or their future careers. We are frustrated with these students, who seem unlikely ever to attain the language skills necessary to function in a bilingual business environment. Many of them do poorly in their business courses as well. If we identify the weak students early on, we can suggest or even encourage a change of major to International Studies, a more loosely structured program with less emphasis on foreign language based in the History/ Political Science department, but whatever their reasons, many of these students want to continue in the IL/Bus major.

A related problem is that very few of our IL/Bus students have a genuine and enduring interest in both foreign language study and business. In general, incoming freshmen who choose the International Language/Business major appear to fall into two broad categories: 1) those primarily interested in language study who seek practical, non-academic applications and career opportunities in which to use their linguistic skills, and 2)

students interested mainly in business careers who find the international focus of the major alluring.

Students in the first category usually come gradually to the realization that they have little interest in the business aspect of the major. Some of these students change their major to International Studies, Secondary Education with a foreign language teaching concentration or, less frequently, to a traditional major in a foreign language. Students in the second category often find a much more language intensive curriculum than they expected. Many of these students change their majors to accounting or marketing sometime during their first two years. Some of them keep a minor in one or more foreign languages and occasionally they declare a double major in an SOM discipline and a foreign language.

Foreign language faculty who have been monitoring the progress of the major have several other concerns. One relates to the Admissions Department and University recruiters. We need to make it clear that the International Language/Business major should not be portrayed to prospective students as a easy ticket to a lucrative and glamorous international career. Despite massive publicity regarding the need for foreign language skills in the business world, we are aware that entry level positions in international firms are a rarity. Some of our students have indeed found exciting employment with an international dimension. In fact, I am greatly encouraged by a report I recently received from the University's Office of Institutional Research. The

report details the post-graduate activities of the class of 1991, including those of the 16 International Language/Business majors that graduated that year. Of these, nine are employed on a full-time basis and seven are pursuing graduate studies. None is unemployed or employed part-time. However, to judge from informal contacts we have maintained with some of these students and others who graduated ahead of them, a few are underemployed and others have little regular opportunity to use their language skills on the job. For the most part, we continue to advise students and their parents that further education at the graduate level, perhaps an MBA with international focus, may well be the necessary prerequisite for the type of career in the international business world that many of them have in mind when they contemplate the major.

In order to assure the continued success of the IL/Bus major, the faculty of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, in consultation with School of Management faculty and administrators, must make a genuine effort to identify areas of the program that can be improved. At present, for example, we have no real internship component to the program, although the possibility of an internship in conjunction with the study abroad experience exists in the University catalog. A lack of firms with international divisions in the immediate geographical area obviously makes the possibility of local internships unlikely. However, we should make every effort to identify and contact all international firms in the northeastern region, and to establish

internship opportunities for our students wherever possible. Likewise, we need to make a thorough search of study abroad programs through other Universities to see which, if any, have internship components. An effort of this scope will of course require released or reassigned time from teaching. In this regard, the administration needs to be made aware that this is an essential element of program development that requires a commitment of faculty resources beyond normal classroom duties.

Finally, we need to reconsider the business component of the major. At present, the business courses consist of basic sequences in Accounting and Economics, upper division courses in Managing and Marketing, and a series of three upper division courses, one required and two electives, in international business. We should consider restructuring this curriculum to provide greater depth in at least one SOM department, and perhaps an additional sequence in a skills area, such as accounting. In addition, we should broaden our current consultation with SOM faculty to include discussions regarding what business courses will best assure entry into graduate programs other than our own. We should consider establishing tracks (accounting, economics/ finance, marketing, preparation for graduate studies, etc.) in the business component of the major that parallel the language tracks that already exist in the foreign language component. And we need to seriously consider the hard questions concerning where any additional credits in the business component will come from. That is, would they be at the expense of language courses? Should

we go the route of many credit heavy majors and request variance from some portion of our general education program? Some of these questions obviously depend on the results of a general education review that is currently taking place, but that uncertainty should not keep us from posing the questions and making an honest effort to continue the development of the major in a way that best benefits our current and future students.